

Bulgaria Brought to Ruin by Ferdinand

Checkered Career of Ruler Who Used Subjects as Mercenary Pawns and Bankrupted Nation

By F. CUNLIFFE-OWEN.

EMPEROR ALEXANDER III. of Russia was accounted a rather dull man. But he showed prescience when in 1887, at the time of Ferdinand of Coburg's election to the throne at Sofia, he prophesied that in the end the new ruler would bring ruin and desolation upon the Bulgarian nation.

Bulgaria was then in the first decade of its freedom and independence, won for it from the Turks by the Russians. Its national debt was merely nominal and taxes weighed but lightly on the almost entirely agricultural population. At the outset of the present war the national debt had risen to over \$200,000,000. Today it is estimated to exceed a billion dollars, a quite intolerable burden for a peasant population of little over four million. Small wonder, under the circumstances, that Bulgaria, finding herself unable to obtain any further loans abroad, was obliged a few weeks ago to default on the payment of the coupons of her treasury bonds.

Sorry Change Made in 30 Years.

Hopelessly bankrupt, despoiled and tyrannized by her late German and Austrian friends, forced to abject and unconditional surrender by the Entente invaders of her territory, compelled to relinquish all the fruits of her victories in the earlier Balkan wars, branded as the most faithless of allies: that is the sorry condition in which Bulgaria, the so promising peasant state of thirty years ago, is left by Ferdinand.

The Bulgarian people participated in his shameful betrayal of their allies of the Balkan League at the close of the first Balkan war, and the atrocities which their troops have perpetrated in Greece, and especially in Serbia, during the last two years, atrocities surpassing in horror even those of which the Germans rendered themselves guilty in Belgium, France and Rumania, show that the Bulgars have learned little of the ways and precepts of western civilization under the rule of Ferdinand.

Although Ferdinand leaves Bulgaria completely ruined he is known to have made plenty of personal provision for the rainy days by which he has now been overtaken. True, he was obliged to spend a considerable amount of money in securing his election to the Bulgarian throne. "Pots de vin" were freely distributed by him in obtaining the support of the leading statesmen and politicians of Sofia, Ministers being rated at 50,000 florins apiece and members of the Sobranje at a beggarly 15,000 a head.

Kissed Turk's Hand Publicly.

Then there were Sultan Abdul Hamid and all sorts of great dignitaries at Constantinople to be bribed. For until 1908 Ferdinand was subject to the suzerainty of the Sublime Porte, and is the only Christian prince in modern times to have abased himself sufficiently before the Moslem Padishah at Stamboul as publicly to kiss his hand. But for all that Ferdinand spent in buying his election to the Bulgarian throne and in winning the recognition of Abdul the Damned at Constantinople he recouped himself afterward many hundredfold.

Prematurely aged, looking more like a septuagenarian than merely 57, obese and infirm, he presents but little resemblance to the slender, perfumed and tightly corseted youth with painted cheeks and rouged lips who made his first entry into Sofia in August, 1887, on horseback.

Edward VII., no mean judge of character, entertained a positive loathing for Ferdinand, prevented the late Queen Victoria from carrying out her intention of bestowing upon him the Order of the Garter in 1899, and was wont to declare that Ferdinand poisoned his annual visits to Marienbad by arranging to be there at the same time, harassing him with his unwelcome company.

Edward made no concealment of the fact that he considered Ferdinand as utterly unscrupulous and even more lack-



Ferdinand of Bulgaria (with glasses) visiting Austrian headquarters.

ing than the Kaiser in the instincts and ethics of a gentleman. Ferdinand in spite of all this invited himself in the role of kinsman and friend to the obsequies of the late King, exciting general indignation in London by his callous attitude and by his unseemly mirth and manifestations of impatience at the state funeral.

Leo XIII. remains on record as the most sagacious and worldly wise Pope of modern times. Yet he literally drove Ferdinand from his presence at the close of an audience which he had reluctantly granted to him at the Vatican, and then personally excommunicated him for violation of oaths taken on the Gospels and for other crimes against both common law and religion.

Quickly Went Back on His Word.

Within six hours after voluntarily giving his personal word to Emperor Alexander III., by wire, and verbally to Prince Lobanoff, the Russian Ambassador at Vienna, that he would under no circumstances accept the Bulgarian throne, he left for Sofia to take possession thereof, driving indeed straight from the Muscovite embassy to the railroad terminus. In the same way he broke his plighted word to his father-in-law, the late Robert of Bourbon, last sovereign Duke of Parma, to Emperor Francis Joseph, to Sultan Abdul Hamid, to King George of Greece, to King Peter of Serbia, and even to the Kaiser, who at one time forbade his Minister at Sofia to hold any communication with Ferdinand, or even to salute him in the street.

He showed the basest ingratitude to his first Premier, Stambouloff, and is generally believed to have instigated his murder at the very gates of the royal palace. Indeed for a long time the widow preserved in a black velvet and glass frame the hands of her husband, which had been severed by the knives of the assassins when he raised his arms to shield his head. There was an inscription on the frame to the effect that he had been murdered by orders of Ferdinand.

Another King who assuredly will never be permitted to reign again is Nicholas of Montenegro, who in spite of his having been living for the past two years or more in France, wholly dependent upon the hospitality of the French Government for his maintenance, has recently been discovered to be giving not alone encouragement, but even a portion of the money which he received from the French Treasury to the publication of a paper edited in Switzerland by Austrian subjects and circulated through Austrian agencies in the southern provinces of the Dual Empire opposing the Jugo-Slav agreement

to which the Entente stands committed and which provides for the union of Serbia and Montenegro after the war under the sceptre of the Serbian Regent, Crown Prince Alexander, one of the most gallant and heroic figures of the present war and of the two preceding Balkan campaigns.

President Wilson has given a pledge to the world that in determining future conditions after the restoration of peace the wishes of those nations embroiled in the present war shall be consulted in the choice of their rulers and of their form of government, and that no races, least of all those who have fought on our side in this titanic conflict of the last four years, shall be subjected to the sway of any ruler or dynasty, native or alien, against their will.

The Serbs of Serbia and of Austria-Hungary, as well as the Montenegrins, who are to all intents and purposes Serbs, have already intimated in no uncertain fashion their desire to be united as a Jugo-Slav nation under the sovereignty of Crown Prince Alexander of Serbia, who is, through his mother, a grandson of Nicholas. The Montenegrins indeed look upon him and take pride in him as one of their own race. They are a brave people, who have not only harassed the Austrian invaders of their native land without cessation, but have also rendered valuable service on the Entente front in France. But they will have nothing more to do with their old King, who celebrates his seventy-seventh birthday on Tuesday next, or with his disreputable sons, whom they accuse of having betrayed their country to the enemy.

Never Will Forgive the King.

Patriotic Montenegrins will never forgive King Nicholas for the manner in which he negotiated secretly for peace with the Central Powers, both through his eldest son, Crown Prince Danilo, and directly with Emperor Francis Joseph several weeks before his final surrender took place, nor will they forgive his surrender of Lovcen, the sacred mountain of the Montenegrins, surrendered by fortifications that rendered it an impregnable stronghold of the utmost value to the Entente, because it controlled the great Austrian naval station and arsenal on the Gulf of Cattaro and occupied the most commanding position on the east Adriatic coast.

King Nicholas's order for the surrender of Lovcen was followed by another also bearing his signature for the immediate demobilization and disarmament of the Montenegrin army. Part of his troops refused to obey this command, sought

Nicholas of Montenegro Another King Likely to Lose His Throne as Result of Great War

refuge in the mountain fastnesses and have been carrying on a guerrilla warfare against the Austrian invaders ever since under gallant Gen. Veshovich. Several thousands of others managed to make their way to France for service under the French flag on the French front. Some 7,000 others, mostly recruits unarmed and defenceless, were taken prisoners by the Austrians and reduced to barbarous forms of slavery.

King Nicholas and his sons were obliged to flee from Montenegro, not from the enemy, but from their own people, who threatened them with death for the betrayal of the nation. Prince Mirko made his way to Vienna, where, living in luxury on an allowance from the Austrian Crown, he died of excesses last spring. King Nicholas sought refuge first in Italy, where his son-in-law, King Victor Emmanuel, and his daughter, Queen Helen, showed him a very cold shoulder and declined to offer him any hospitality. He has been ever since in France, dependent on French charity, constantly pestering the Government for a larger allowance in order to pay for his heavy losses at the card table.

Card Playing Chief Occupation.

For although in his earlier days he dabbled in literature and thereby attracted the attention and encomium of William E. Gladstone, his chief occupation has always been card playing. Indeed when he still reigned at Cetinje the Russian and Austrian envoys accredited to his court received special funds to lose to him at the card table and thus to secure favor and good will for their respective empires.

His eldest son, Crown Prince Danilo, married to a German princess, has spent most of his time since the beginning of the war at Monaco, has never drawn a sword or fired a shot in the defence of his country and has long enjoyed a European reputation as one of the most contemptible scions of any reigning house. As for Prince Peter, from whom much was hoped in his younger days, he has recently been carrying on in his father's behalf the intrigues with Austrian and German agents in Switzerland against the Jugo-Slav agreement for a greater Serbia.

Nicholas has never known either gratitude or loyalty and until obliged to abandon Cetinje was always playing off his son-in-law, King Victor Emmanuel, against Emperor Francis Joseph and the latter against the Emperor of Russia for the sake of money, and on the outbreak of the first Balkan war actually held up the operations of the entire Balkan League for four days in order to enable him to effect a coup de bourse with some shady foreign financiers in Paris. Never again will the Montenegrins, some of the bravest and most liberty loving fighters in Europe, be willing to submit to his rule.

Office Building Romance

STREAMS of people pouring out of the office building at noon daily scarcely note the blind young man who stands at one side of the corridor near a radiator so as not to be in the current of the throng.

As the minutes pass the blind young man clearly recognizes from the access of travel that the noon hour has arrived. Expectantly his head half turns in the direction of the descending elevators which are crowded with office toilers on their way to lunch.

In the shuffling volume of passing hundreds, he listens for a certain footfall. He listens, too, for a certain laughing voice which he can distinguish from all the rest, because it belongs to a plain but neat young woman who always leaves her merry companions to step aside and greet the blind young man. When she speaks the sightless face brightens with relief from the strained suspense of waiting.

"They are very happy in each other's company," said an employee of the building. "I hear they will be married in the fall—surely the oddest, most touching pair of sweethearts in all New York."